

LutheranWoman

June 2002

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Grabbing Life
Honor Thy Elders





LETTERS

I am excited by the emphasis on involving “younger women” in Women of the ELCA.

While I am excited, I am also bewildered at the recent highlighting of including young women. At 32, I am probably considered a young woman and have always been involved with the women’s organization in my congregation. My friends also have been involved. About seven years ago, we started our own Bible study circle. Babysitting and meeting in the evenings are necessities since some young women work and have families. The other two established circles supported us by providing the babysitting. The younger women also serve on the women’s board of our congregation and church council.

The Northeastern Ohio Synodical Women’s Organization had a board member who served from age 26 to 30. This synod also has a newsletter editor who is in her early 30s. Yes, this board member was me, and the newsletter editor is Lori Domek, a good friend. We were both Young Women Guests at our Synodical Women’s convention. We also attended the Women’s Synodical Leadership Training and Retreat in Pennsylvania a few years ago.

Surprisingly, no one at this event invited us to share our ideas to encourage young women to get involved in Women of the ELCA. I was disappointed that no one thought to ask for our younger women’s perspective. This past disenchantment adds to my

enthusiasm that Women of the ELCA is now attempting to encourage women of all ages to participate in the wealth of spiritual opportunities it offers.

Mindy Engler—Massillon, Ohio

At a time when I said to myself, “I’d like to know more about our Palestinian sisters and neighbors,” lo and behold, what do I read but *The Lutheran* article “We are not terrorists” (February 2002) by David Miller. On top of that, the next day I read *LWT* (January/February 2002), “Our Forgotten Sisters in Palestine.” Wow! To say the least, I am astounded—whether planned or not. I have a habit of reading some things from back cover to front, and I saw [in the March 2002 issue] that an ELCA delegation visited this area, including our Cathi Braasch. The pictures and the questions and answers bring it so close to home, and with the websites, our technology speaks volumes.

Though I cringed when I heard of the change to the *LWT* format, I do appreciate what you and your staff are doing. The fact that the articles coincided was no accident, nor the fact that I happened to be reading them back to back.

Thank you and your staff for keeping us abreast of what’s important! Your sister in Christ,

Sally Hagy—Reinholds, Pennsylvania
Swamp Lutheran Church

Subscription questions? See page 43. **Send letters to:** Letters to the Editor, *Lutheran Woman Today*, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4183; email to: lwt@elca.org. Please include your name, city, and state on all correspondence. *LWT* publishes letters representative of those received on a given subject. Letters may be edited for space. Letters must be signed, but requests for anonymity will be honored.

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GIVE US THIS DAY

The Fast (and Slow) Lanes of Life

by Marj Leegard

WHEN WE ARE VERY YOUNG, THE LIFE STAGE WE ARE IN SEEMS MOSTLY THE JUMPING-OFF PLACE FOR THE NEXT STAGE, AND WE GIVE OURSELVES OLYMPIAN THRUSTS TO GAIN MOMENTUM.

Even our parents look forward to our next stages: the ability to sleep all night, the next tooth, the next stage in bottom underwear. And when we are young, there are few days that move as slowly as the days before a driver's license is finally our own. Youthful anticipation is strong and demanding, but eventually the moment comes when we would rather linger on a birthday past, not celebrate a new one.

I was not cheerful about my 50th birthday. I was downright grumpy. My husband brought home a box whose shape did not really disguise its contents. He loves food cooked outdoors, and I knew it was a grill. I personally believe that houses with roofs and screened windows and lovely stoves were made for my pleasure. I was not excited about opening my gift from him. I left it until the last.

When I tore off the wrappings my heart soared way beyond my 50s gloom and into the wonderful possibilities of—can it be?—a guitar! I had never played one and still don't, but I have wonderful

times trying. Chords sound, and then disappear. Snatches of tunes bring back snatches of memory.

Suddenly, life was not over but just beginning again, something to be celebrated not only with music but with paint and brushes and ideas turned into words aligned on paper. The days were not long enough to contain all the bursts of creativity.

And now the stage of life slows again. There is the nearness of the added dimension, eternity.

We were fussing one day about a local road construction project, and finally we noticed the projected completion date: 2011. We laughed. The possibility of being here and being aware of the change is less than good. It is no longer our worry, if it ever was.

In Romans 5:11, the Contemporary English Version says, "By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God."

It is good that we have that peace at every stage in our lives. It is even more precious as anticipated birthdays become fewer. The celebrations will never end.

LWT columnist Marj Leegard and her husband, Jerome, live in Detroit Lakes, Minn.

A PREVIEW OF

Grace upon Grace: A Study of the Gospel of John

LWT's featured Bible study September 2002–May 2003

This new Bible study begins with the September issue. We think you'll find it as refreshing and enlightening as we have during its development.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus turns water into wine, gives sight to the man born blind, and raises Lazarus from the dead. He has long conversations with Nicodemus, washes the feet of his disciples, and challenges Pilate. He tells his hearers that he is the bread of life, good shepherd, light of the world, and the way, the truth and the life.

This nine-session study focuses on how John shows us who Jesus is—Word made flesh—through several stories not found in the other Gospels. We invite you to come to understand more deeply not only the unique portrait of Jesus that emerges from this Gospel, but what the Gospel of John reveals to us about God through Jesus Christ.



Grace
upon
Grace

Author Mary Hinkle, associate professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, is a gifted teacher as well as a pastor with a keen understanding of the needs of group Bible study participants. She is a former parish pastor, having served in North Dakota.

While the only essential piece you need to complete this study is your subscription to *Lutheran Woman Today*, the companion pieces will add depth and meaning to your study.

The *Leader Guide* (ISBN 6-0001-6342-8; \$6.95) contains everything the leader needs to make sessions more enriching and enjoyable: additional background, a guide to each of the questions, tips on how to lead and direct the discussions, and more.

The *Companion Bible* (ISBN 6-0001-6341-X; \$3.95) is a handy volume that puts all the texts and cross-references in one place. It is also a convenient place to jot notes, underline, or highlight as you proceed through the study. It is printed in a comfortable, easy-to-read size.

Both these resources, as well as the always popular Bible study bookmarks, are available from our publishing partner, Augsburg Fortress. Call toll-free 800-328-4648 to order any of these resources.

Please note that the *Resource Book* has been discontinued. The material that formerly would have appeared in the resource book will now be included in *Lutheran Woman Today* alongside the study session. Now there's one less piece to juggle, not to mention one less item to purchase!

Now is a great time to promote new Bible study participation as well as new subscriptions to *LWT*. New subscriptions received in June will begin with the September issue, the start of the *Grace upon Grace* study. Call 800-426-0115, ext. 639 for more information, or see page 43.

If you are interested in receiving *Grace upon Grace* in Spanish, please call the LWT office at 800-638-3522, ext. 2743, or drop us a note via email at lwt@elca.org. This will help us determine the size of the audience as well as how best to deliver the Spanish version to our subscribers. With any message, include your name, phone number, address, and number of copies you or your group will need.

GROWING UP, GROWING OLDER, GROWING IN GOD

by Catherine Malotky

I worry about growing older. I worry not so much because I am aging, but because I am afraid of what I might become. I do not want to become a crabby, inflexible, demanding old lady. I want to be gracious and full of curiosity. I want to laugh often and honor the lives of those around me.

I want to be an elder in the richest sense of the word: one whom others welcome into their presence because she is wise and true.

A PLACE IN GOD'S HOUSEHOLD

My baptism will help me, and so will my faith. Though I have much life ahead of me—at least my family history suggests that it will be so—I have been “becoming older and wiser” all my life. Because I was brought to the font as an infant, I have had the privilege of that orienting experience to help guide me. Like all of us who have been baptized, I have been given a life in the Spirit.

Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:9, “But you are not of the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Then Paul goes on to say, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.”

If change is the constant in our lives—if we develop, as psychologists suggest—then how can we be moored? To what are we tethered? We are tethered to this promise of the Spirit and our adoption—our place in God's household. This is our orienting reality.

AN I.D.

Think about this for a moment. In Paul's day, and even in our own history, an important question for slaves was, “To whom do you belong?” We might have found the answer on their bodies—a pierced ear or a tattoo. But their belonging was temporary, until their owner transferred them to another owner. A slave did not come from somewhere and leave anything to posterity, by definition.

An adopted slave, however, gained a place in a family. An adopted one gained a history and a future, a family name. An adopted one belonged not because of a business deal, but because of commitment and even love. An adopted one could be an heir and could, in turn, produce more heirs.

So this is Paul's sense of our reality as baptized children of God. We gain a family name, so to speak, and a history (the story of God's faithfulness) and a future (God's promises to us and to our children). We have an identity that is deeper than the stage we happen to be growing through. This kind of continuity and security allows me to see my life as both greater than I imagine and less important than I imagine. I need not change the world by myself, but I do have a calling to fulfill.



AN UNFINISHED WORK

Paul's next point is this: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Romans 8:19, 22). Because I am baptized, I can see the world as a work in progress, constantly influenced by God's redeeming ways, calling it and me and you into the abundant life God desires for us all. So my primary job through life's stages is to watch for God at work calling forth life.

I watch my adolescent daughters live through the tumultuous stage that is theirs now. When the tough one weeps because she cannot adopt that adorable puppy that buried its head in her lap at the humane society, she can turn her attention to the tender part of her that is longing to be revealed because she is a child of God. When the one who has always been such a fine student experiments with making time for friends in addition to her books, she can balance her lower grades with her growth in grace, and watch and listen for God's guidance as she seeks a balanced life. As I struggle to let go of these amazing daughters so they might blossom into the adults they are becoming, I can count my frustration and my tears as growing pains, a part of God's gracious flow of life.

As my vivacious mother and her sisters live with aching joints and creaky bones—as they redefine themselves again as grandmothers and 70-something women—they pray to see God's will for their lives, knowing that they still have a purpose and a calling to fulfill. And I know that my grandmother, now in her late 90s, must listen for God's will for her. I know she prays constantly for all of us (between baseball games anyway), and her warm welcome when we visit her is a sure sign that she knows she is God's own, given to the world as a gift, even now as she makes her way toward her own end and the life that waits for her with Jesus in eternity.

LOST AND FOUND ON THE WAY

It is good when we can stay tuned to God. But when we lose sight of our mooring—and we will—we hear Paul speak again: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26–27).

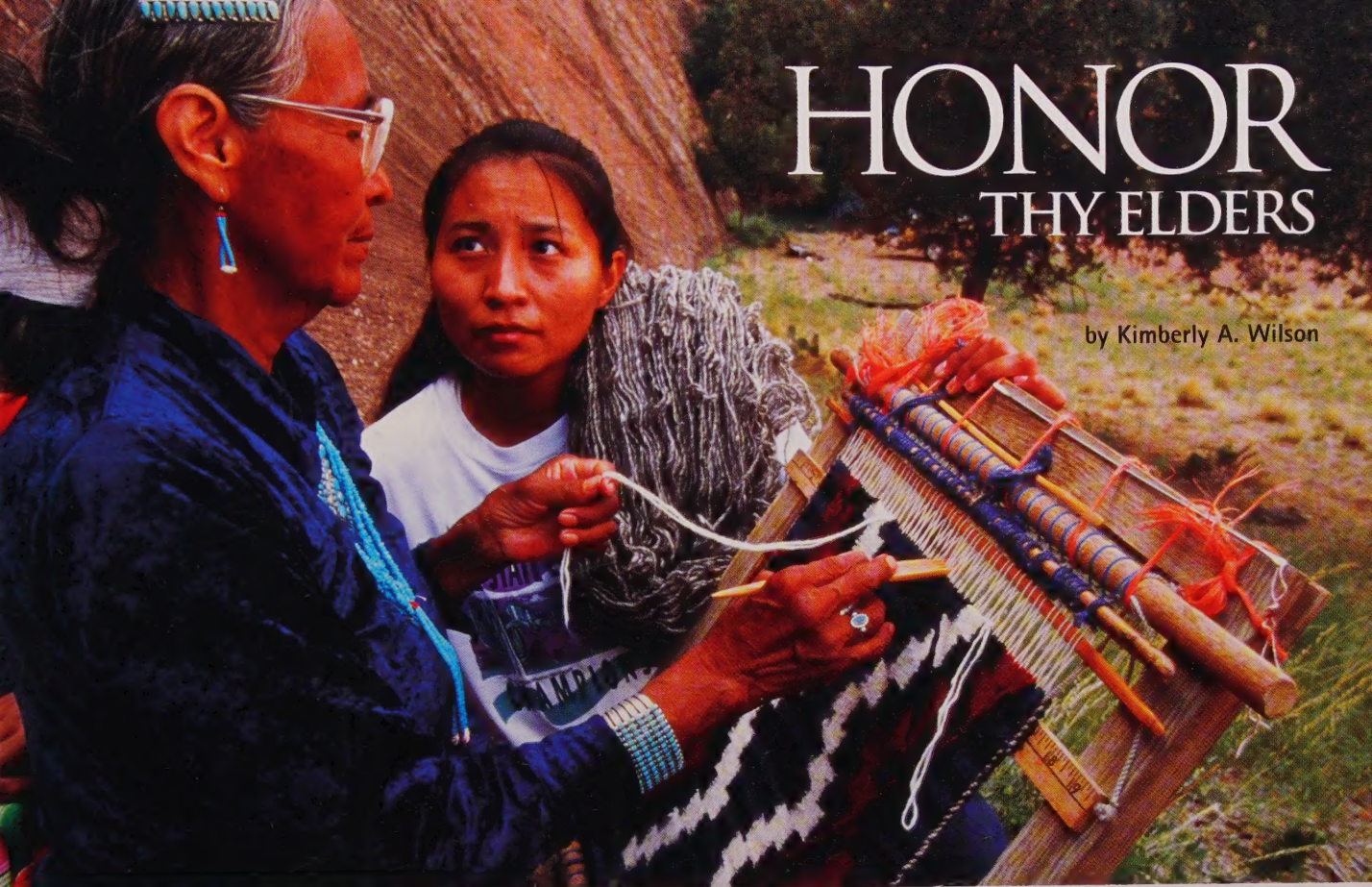
A person can get lost on the way. A gale can blow up and swirl around us, and before we know it, we've lost sight of God's welcome and our place in the family. We can begin to think that the world is out to get us—that we're not worth the affection or attention. Or we can get lost in our successes or our busyness and lose track of that which defines us—whose we are. But again, it is baptism that holds us fast. Thank goodness our relationship with God does not depend on our ability to stay focused.

"What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

Life unfolds before us, whatever our age or stage. God desires goodness for us and for all. We watch for God's will to be fulfilled in our lives, and live to honor God's will for all those around us and for the creation.

Sisters in Christ, welcome to the family of God.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.



HONOR THY ELDERS

by Kimberly A. Wilson

Around the world, people find honor and even joy in the aging process. In many cultures, the older one grows, the more one is respected by family and friends. Assuming an elder's role in the community brings new rights and responsibilities. Growing older is seen as a gift from God to be treasured, not an inevitable biological process to be feared and denied.

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT AGING

Today, we sometimes take growing older for granted. This was not so in first-century Rome and Palestine, where 75 percent of the population died by their mid-20s, and 90 percent by their mid-40s (according to Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh's *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*). Fewer than three percent of the population lived to be 60 or older. Our modern notion of idolizing youth would have been incomprehensible to these inhabitants of ancient Rome and Palestine. Growing old was a privilege few people attained. Even more, their society deeply

valued its older members because they were the source of community memory and knowledge.

In the ancient world, age was considered synonymous with wisdom and special insight. Consider the prophet Anna. The scriptures describe her as "of great age," a widow who had reached the age of 84 and worshiped God in the temple night and day (Luke 2:36-38). Anna's great age earned her a respected place in the community as a living source of community history and understanding. Along with Simeon, Anna was present when Mary and Joseph presented Jesus at the temple. Anna praised

God and spoke of the child “to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

Here’s a look at how aging is viewed in different cultures today.

MIDDLE EAST

Not surprisingly, many Middle Eastern cultures continue honoring their older members, just as they did in Jesus’ time. Kamy and Fery Moghbeli, active members of my congregation (Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Baldwin, New York), describe the respect for older people in Iran, where they were raised. When an older person enters a room, others stand until the older person is seated. Families, rather than considering an older relative a burden, see it as a blessing to have an older person still with them. The older the person, the more he or she is respected. At the mosque during prayers, older people are escorted to the front. If there is no room, younger people will always give up their places for elders. Kamy comments, “There is total respect for older members of the community. We care about their experience, their wisdom. It is not a burden to care for them, it is an honor.”

JAMAICA

Jamaicans find growing older a reason to celebrate. Recently, I visited with retired ELCA missionaries Rev. Ted and Joanne Swanson. They spoke of their many years serving the church around the world in India, Egypt, and Jamaica. Of all the places they lived, Ted said, “Jamaica was the most enjoyable in many ways. Whenever two Jamaicans meet, they have a party!” My own experience with West Indian congregants at my church bears out the truth of Pastor Swanson’s observation. Cultural values in Jamaica include both strong relationships and celebration.

A special party is held when a person reaches the age of 50, or “5 and O” as Jamaicans say. A couple

in my church who grew up in Jamaica, Pearl and Owen Brown, explain that for 50th birthday celebrations, relatives come long distances to share in the joy of the occasion. A traditional meal of curried goat, fried plantains, rice, and peas is often served, followed by a delicious “black cake” made from burnt sugar, wine, and fruit. Family members and friends make speeches honoring the one turning 50. People take care to thank God for this person’s life and to express this gratitude and appreciation to their friend or family member.

Another Jamaican cultural value is to tell their beloved elders how much they are loved and respected as they age; they don’t wait to express those sentiments in a eulogy. A Jamaican woman in my parish who lived into her 90s, Daphne Spence, always said, “Bring me flowers now, so I can enjoy them. Don’t wait till I die!” Her friends and church family honored her Jamaican roots and respected her wishes! Daphne lived a long, happy life at home surrounded by friends, family, and flowers.

AFRICA

Samuel Kofi Nuako, a candidate for ordained ministry in the ELCA, described for me the communal respect for older members of the community in his homeland of Ghana, Africa. Sam said, “When we talk of age, we talk of wisdom. To have an older member in our family is an honor.”

Sam was born into the Akans cultural group (the Ashanti people), which is a matrilineal society. Among the Akans, who make up 60 to 70 percent of the population of Ghana, a child is considered to be born into the mother’s family and inherits from her side, rather than from the father’s side. Therefore, grandmothers have great influence in decision-making and a strong role in the community. Sam said, “We always consult an older member of the

family before making a decision. For example, when I was working in the city, I would always consult my mother regarding important decisions.”

Older members of African cultures serve as sources of advice, wisdom, and family information. Respect is given to older members of the community, neighbors as well as relatives. In rural villages, a council of elders meets regularly to offer insight and advice to the chief or other leader. Sam contrasts the vital role of the elderly in African society with their common place in American society: “One striking difference between the United States and Ghana is that we don’t have elderly homes. Society looks to the children and grandchildren to take proper care of the older ones. I know of people who were denied permission to marry because they did not take proper care of their parents or grandparents.”

VIETNAM

A Vietnamese proverb, “*Cang gia cang deo cang dai*,” means “The older one becomes, the stronger one gets.” These words capture the deep respect given to aging Asians. Ng Thi Kim Lien, a native of Hanoi, said, “An older person is very important in the family. He or she is given greater ‘weight’ than one who is younger. His or her voice is strong and has important influence when making family decisions.” Special celebrations are often held for 60th, 70th, 80th, and 90th birthdays. People who reach these ages are honored with a banquet on these milestone birthdays. Relatives and friends make speeches and present gifts that reflect the character of the person being honored. Best wishes are offered by all for continued health and long life!

LATIN AMERICA

Heriberto and Maria Elena Prudencio are from El Salvador and share a ministry among Latinos in the

Metro New York Synod. Berto is pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Hempstead, and Maria Elena is a deacon in the congregation. They describe their cultural values in this way: “The teaching we received as children was to respect older people. They have lived many years, and their experiences should help give a sense of life and wisdom to the younger generations.”

As a child, Maria Elena learned to value older people by her parents’ words and actions. Maria Elena’s Aunt Mercedes was a widow in Honduras. Mercedes had no children and no one to care for her in her older years. Maria Elena’s parents traveled to Honduras to bring her aunt home to El Salvador to live with their family. As in other Latino families, Aunt Mercedes took part in guiding, giving wisdom, and, if necessary, correcting the younger members. Mercedes was a vital part of Maria Elena’s family, deeply loved and respected by her nieces and nephews. She passed away surrounded by the family, not alone. Pastor Prudencio said, “I am impressed that even very poor families in El Salvador find the room, food, and time to care for the older members of the family. Most important of all, they love and respect them.”

AN ENRICHED PERSPECTIVE

Learning about the ways our neighbors value the aging members of their communities enriches our perspective on the gift of growing older. Many people are fearful or dismayed at the thought of growing older, but in truth, aging can mean growing in wisdom, joy, and respect for God, others, and the world God has created.

Rev. Kimberly A. Wilson is a graduate of Wartburg Theological Seminary and pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Baldwin, New York.



SPOILERS AND SHEPHERDS

by Kay Marshall Strom

Dan and I had only been married a month when my publisher called about a writing assignment. “We need someone to do a book for grandmothers,” the editor said. “Since we did that wedding book with you and your daughter seven years ago, we figured you might be the person to do this book.”

I explained that I wasn’t a grandmother. I was a lot of things—the mother of two grown children, a widow, a newlywed—but not a grandmother.

“Sorry,” she said. “For this job, we need a grandmother.”

I hung up the phone and told Dan about the conversation.

“Hey,” he said, “what about my grandchildren?”

“Oh, yeah!” I replied.

How could I forget? Dan’s daughter Sara and son-in-law Jim have four children, and they live less than five miles from us. I’ve known those little ones since they were born. We see them all the time, and I take care of them frequently. The children and I have favorite games that only we play. But I never thought of them as my grandchildren. Until then.

“Call her back,” Dan said.

So I did. And that’s how grandmotherhood crept up on me. I joyfully discovered it as I wrote *Quiet Moments for Grandmothers* (Servant Publications).

Very quickly, those relationships began to blossom into something far more special than I had ever anticipated, especially with Phoenix, the oldest, then six years old. Her family was at our house for Easter dinner a month after my “discovery.” As we relaxed together that afternoon, Phoenix casually said, “Kay, you used to just be my friend, but now you’re my grandma!”

Grandma! A full-fledged grandma!

I love my grandchildren, and I take my grandma job seriously. That’s because I am convinced that there is a role I can play in the lives of my grandchildren that no one else on earth can fill as well as I can. It’s true for every other grandmother, too. However we came into our role, there are some things no one can else do as well as we can.

SPOIL CONSTRUCTIVELY

I told my own children from the beginning that I intended to be a spoiling kind of grandma. When you’re a parent, it’s necessary to concentrate on such things as where muddy shoes belong, finishing all the broccoli on the plate, what time is proper for bedtime, and when candy may and may not be eaten. But when you’re a grandma, it’s more important to focus on unconditional love and acceptance. Grandma

should be a refuge from the struggles of life. And, hey—when grandma time is over, you get to send the kids back home!

SPOIL SELECTIVELY

Once, after Phoenix had had an especially hard day with her three brothers, I picked her up from school to spend the night with me. We made chocolate pudding for dessert, then had popcorn while we watched a video. When bedtime came, we snuggled down together and read books until it was time to turn out the lights. The next morning, we made her favorite breakfast and wrapped her in a snuggly quilt for the ride to school. When it came time to get out of the car, she sighed and said, “Grandma, I wish I was an only child.”

Sara and Jim have four little ones, and the twins have autism. That means there isn’t time to give anyone the full-time attention every child craves. No wonder Phoenix longs for a little extra spoiling.

Here’s where grandma comes in. We get to let each of our grandchildren have a chance to be an indulged “only child” now and then.

SECURE SOLIDARITY

In the unpredictable world in which they are growing up, our grandkids desperately need us to be solid and dependable. They need the security of our experience. They need us to model the future for them. When they see grandma living life with vitality, enthusiasm, and joy, they see a future that is promising and hopeful. And what a payoff there is for us grandmas! We get the special blessing of our grandchildren. Because they help us look both backward and forward, we find it much easier to understand where we should set our priorities. We can rest assured that our future, and the future of those who come after us, is safely in God’s hands.

SHEPHERD SPIRITUALLY

When I think of values and spiritual wisdom, I immediately think of my Grandma Marshall. So much of who I am came from her. I don’t think she deliberately set out to teach me; it just flowed from who she was. That’s what I long for my grandchildren to say one day when they look back on their time with me.

But it isn’t always easy. My grandchildren’s family doesn’t share my religious convictions. My husband and I have to be considerate of Sara and Jim’s parental authority. So I choose books and videos carefully, and I read and watch together with the children so that I can explain and expand on what we’ve seen together. We take the children to church with us—with their parents’ permission. I talk openly about my faith. I sing praises to God in the course of the day. I point out God’s hand in creation. I thank God for our food, and before we go to bed, I thank God for the day we spent together.

Grandmothers and grandchildren—what would we do without each other? Grandchildren are a real-life fountain of youth for grandmas. They bring a spring back into our steps (yesterday I played hopscotch with Phoenix and Sage!) and present us with an endless plate of possibilities. Because of them, we once again see through eyes of wonder.

And we give our grandchildren two very special gifts: roots that enable them to stand strong, and wings that allow them to soar heavenward. I realize now that becoming a grandmother was just the beginning. Living life as a grandmother is a wonderful journey filled with joy and wonder!

Kay Marshall Strom is the grandmother of four, a popular speaker at writer's conferences, and the author of more than 20 books. She and her husband, Dan, reside in Santa Barbara, Calif.



MOTHERING SEASONS

Spirituality in Our Children's World

by Kirsi Stjerna

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH EVERYBODY WANTS TO BE SPIRITUAL THESE DAYS. SPIRITUALITIES OF VARIOUS KINDS ARE BEING PRACTICED IN COMMUNITIES EVERYWHERE AND IN PEOPLE'S PRIVATE LIVES. EVERYONE IS THIRSTY FOR MEANINGFUL LIVING, FOR CLARITY ABOUT THE ULTIMATE IN LIFE—THEIR GOD—AND EVERYONE IS SHOPPING AROUND FOR A RIGHT FIT IN SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS, PRACTICES, DIRECTIONS, AND COMMUNITY WITH OTHER LIKE-MINDED SPIRITUAL SEEKERS. YOU CAN EVEN SEARCH THE INTERNET AND FIND ALL KINDS OF SITES THAT PROCLAIM THAT THEY WILL HELP YOU FIND WHAT YOU ARE SEEKING.

All of us are interested in spirituality or in one way or another practicing it, without perhaps naming it as such. The question for parents and others who care about our children's future is this: How do we find a language about spirituality that makes sense to our children so that they can boldly claim to be spiritual and live a spiritual life?

Rooting Spirituality in Our Experience of the World

Let's start by redefining and creating some new language for spirituality, because the ways we have understood it in the past don't necessarily resonate with people's current experiences and situations.

Historically, among Christians, spirituality has been associated with a particular dimension of life, a special kind of piety or imitation of Jesus. Spirituality has been associated with teachings and practices that focus on cultivating the spirit, the soul life, that which has been perceived as the higher dimension of human life.

In a sense, spirituality is seen as separate from reality. The earthy aspects of human life have been viewed as needing to be held at a distance in order to free one's spirit to be spiritual. Upward direction, introspection, yearning for higher goals—this has been the mode in what we call Christian spirituality. The language we have inherited about spirituality reflects this split between the spiritual and the physical, and the idea of retreat from the merely physical world.

This split between the higher and lower dimensions has also resulted in the notion of spiritual hierarchies, the perception that some people are more spiritual than others. We respect certain individuals as spiritually exemplary while we fail to see in others any trace of spirituality because they don't seem to fit the mold, use the same language in describing their experiences, or live after the same aspirations we think constitute spiritual living. This soul- and self-oriented spirituality has also contributed to our continuing alienation from one another and from

creation, a serious alienation that allows injustice and hurt in the world to continue.

In light of the challenges of today's world and our holistic trends, narrowly focused, me-centered and human soul-centered spirituality can be unhealthy and harmful, globally speaking, because it can feed different forms of selfishness, individualism, narcissism, consumerism—all aspects of serious disconnection from the other. These are the modern sins. Who has the luxury, or right, to turn inward and forget the world? Is this what we want to teach our children?

Self-oriented, world-divorcing spirituality can result in our missing out on an important aspect of human life and spiritual capability: connectedness. Connectedness gives us the ability to relate to the life around us, to respond and take responsibility, to be filled and fill lives around us with the Spirit. Spirituality understood this way invites us to participate in the world and to be active in caring for the world.

In Christian terms, we could say that this kind of spirituality calls us to respond with zeal to Jesus' call to love God and one another in practice and to labor passionately toward the realization of the just and grace-filled kingdom of God for all. What could be more spiritual than that?

Challenges for Children's Spirituality

Bernard McGinn, a scholar of spirituality, has said that spirituality is about everything that is good in life. We could ask, what would not be good in life, as such? What would not be spiritual in life? Maybe we could look at this through the eyes of a child.

What would be the opposite of good, the opposite of life—the opposite of spiritual—to a child? Some basics would be lack of food, lack of home and family, lack of love, joy, hope, and the source of all this, the Ultimate, God. What would make a child

not spiritual, not alive? The inability to connect, inability to love or be loved. Spirituality is as basic as that. It is about life. Whole life. Real life.

Children are spiritual by birth. They learn to form their sense of what is good and spiritual from us and from our traditions, rituals, customs, language, ways of being and interacting. Our communities of faith—always central in Christian spirituality—shape our children's spiritualities and thus their ways of relating to the world and fellow human beings. The challenges for our children today are manifold: To be loving, responsible stewards of the world for the future, they need to find a sense of connectedness with humankind at large, as well as all of creation. They need affirmation of the goodness of the godly spirit they were born with and of the incredible power of that Spirit to transform, create, redeem, and sustain. They need to learn "what's love got to do with it" in preparation for a kingdom of justice, freedom, peace, and love in the world today.

What do I want for my children spiritually? I want my children to discover themselves and meaning in life through their genuine encounters and connectedness with other children of God, with creation, and with the Ultimate, God. I want them to be fueled by that experience to care, to make a difference, to become participants of the kingdom of God. I want them to be empowered and to empower, to be nurtured and to nurture, to be loved and to love. I want them to have passion to live full lives. I want them to be always concerned about the Ultimate. I want them to be part of the Spirit that spirits the world, to be part of the goodness in the world.

Kirsi Stjerna is assistant professor of Reformation church history, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. She is a member of Christ Lutheran, Gettysburg, Penn.

DEACONESS WORK

A Special Calling: Part Two

by E. Louise Williams

This is part two of an article on the special calling of deaconess work. Part one appeared in the May 2002 issue.



When Hertha met an old friend and colleague for lunch, it seemed like a great opportunity to reconnect. Hertha had been retired for several years, as far as deaconesses retire. Her career had been a rich and rewarding one—parish deaconess, social service worker, social work supervisor, and consultant for not-for-profit agencies.

Hertha's friend needed more than just some time to catch up. She needed some help, and she was pretty sure Hertha could provide what she needed. As executive director of an inter-religious fellowship for the homeless, she had previously engaged Hertha as a consultant and knew her expertise well.

"Last winter when it was so terribly cold," she explained, "I was aware that there were still a lot of people who were not being served by any of the existing agencies. Many of them are mental health patients or people involved with drugs or alcohol, or people who simply don't fit other agencies' guidelines. They were being turned away and left on the street to freeze. Several of us got together at my church and worked out a plan where we could open our building and provide a warm place to sleep. The need isn't going away.

Will you help us organize an agency to address this problem in our town?"

Hertha didn't hesitate. "Of course," she replied. It was, after all, the kind of thing she knew how to do, and this kind of volunteer work seemed a natural extension of her deaconess work. So they gathered a small group of people to write bylaws, legally incorporated their organization with the state, obtained not-for-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service, started raising money, and organized a staff.

Hertha still serves on the board of directors for this agency, which is now more than four years old. They are still providing shelter for about 25 people each night from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., along with a small hot meal (provided by local churches) and breakfast (with yesterday's donuts, given by the donut shop down the street).

But in Hertha's mind, this was not enough. She is now helping the agency address larger problems as well. They are meeting with government officials and other agencies to raise awareness of these people who "fall through the cracks," and are challenging the officials and agencies to provide more resources. They

are advocating for individuals who have entitlements they are not receiving—veterans' benefits, mental health care, drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, and so on. They are working toward more facilities, such as a larger shelter and a co-op apartment building for transitional housing, and they are developing programs to help those who are able get back into the job market. They want to change the system so that struggling people can get the assistance needed before they slip into the group that no one else will help.

There are other changes, too, such as the changes in the hearts of some of the church people who bring in the meals and stay overnight at the shelter. They develop more compassion for the homeless people in their town, people they might not have noticed before. They are also more likely to become involved with working for change—or at least supporting it—so that their town will be better able to serve those who have the greatest need on a cold winter night.

WORKING FOR CHANGE The mental pictures of diaconal service as foot-washing and table-waiting from part one of this article must be augmented with a bigger picture, one that is a bit harder to visualize. It is not just caring for the intimate needs of an individual or having a concern for everyone at the table. It means somehow reclaiming the role assigned to humanity in Genesis, to be caretakers of the whole creation. It means catching the vision of the new creation and working toward making that vision more and more visible. This means that deaconess work is concerned with prevention, with understanding the structural and political dimensions of a problem, and with working to reshape the institutions of society. It involves rattling doors and challenging the status quo whenever and wherever people are oppressed or prevented from knowing the abundant life that Christ brings.

Of course, deaconesses have no monopoly on washing feet, waiting on tables, or working for change. God calls the whole people of God to this work. The diaconate (the collective word used for deaconesses, deacons, and diaconal ministers) is one avenue through which the church does this ministry. The role of the deaconess is sometimes that of a doer, being the church's agent in those places of need. Sometimes the role is of equipper and encourager, calling forth the gifts of all the baptized and helping them with the skills and confidence they need to do God's work in the world. And sometimes the role is of sign, a prophetic presence reminding the church to care for those Jesus called "the least of these," and challenging all God's people to be faithful in washing feet, waiting on tables, and working for change.

E. Louise Williams is executive director of the Lutheran Deaconess Association, part-time assistant professor at Valparaiso University, and president of DIAKONIA World Federation of Diaconal Associations and Communities.

Do you think God is calling you to this kind of work? Find out more!

Lutheran Deaconess Association, Valparaiso, Ind. Phone: 219-464-6925; fax: 219-464-6928; online: www.valpo.edu/lda or deacserv@valpo.edu. This independent inter-Lutheran organization educates and supports deaconesses in the ELCA, the ELCIC, and the LCMS.

The Deaconess Community of the ELCA, Gladwyne, Penn. Phone: 610-642-8838; fax: 610-642-3460; online: www.deaconess-elca.org or info@deaconess-elca.org. This community of women is called to ministries by congregations and synods of the ELCA and the ELCIC.

Your ELCA synod office can also help you learn more about "diaconal ministers." This new category of workers in the ELCA includes both women and men.



IDEANET

How Do You Listen to God's Call?

I try to listen to God in a number of ways. Each morning when I read the Bible, I notice which words attract my attention. I write them in my journal and meditate on them that day.

I also use contemplative sitting to listen to God. I sit quietly in my rocker, focus on a tree outside my window, and begin with the phrase, "Be still and know that I am God." For about 15 minutes, I try to avoid distracting thoughts and just be receptive to God's presence—not asking for things or even speaking at all, just sitting in loving attention.

I recently lost my father, and felt God comfort me through the kind words of many people. I remember praying, "Lord, make the days go by quickly so I can get through this pain." A few days later, the thought occurred to me, "I will be with you during this difficult time, but don't miss the many blessings that are happening all around you every day."

Janis Getty—Arlington Heights, Illinois
Our Savior Lutheran Church

God speaks to me especially during my morning devotional quiet time. A dear friend and pastor said a few years ago that our devotional times could be used to pray, ponder, and plan. Truly the Lord speaks to me as he brings things to my heart and mind as I ponder with him. How exciting to look forward to what the Lord has for me each new day!

To discern these thoughts and ideas, I pray about them, seek to know God's will, listen for confirmation from others, and wait for God to speak or reveal his message in other ways.

Darlene Cox—Albuquerque, New Mexico
Faith Lutheran Church

Most recently, my husband and I listened to God when a neighbor died. He wasn't someone we'd been close to, but we took food to the family to show them that we cared about their loss and valued the man's life and family.

I listened to God when our pastor reminded us that when planning programs we need to provide childcare for our young families and schedule events for times that working people can attend. We'll have a special women's coffee on a Saturday morning in the spring, with childcare provided.

We listen to God, too, when we smile at a stranger and when we perform those everyday common courtesies for others. God gives us those nudges; when we're listening, we follow through.

God may sometimes speak to us in a dream or in our quiet times or in our prayer times. I believe God most often speaks to us through the needs of the people around us.

Beulah Moore—Pasco, Washington
Lutheran Church of the Master



Fruitful Season?

by Cynthia L. Scott

HOW WE SEE GOD, how we see creation, and how we see ourselves have everything to do with who we are, whose we are, and where we have been on our journey through life. I remember being a little girl of six, trusting in God and my mom and dad, filled with wonder whether I was climbing a tree, looking at a butterfly, or watching bread rise in the kitchen. I was comfortable taking risks then; if I got in over my head, my folks were usually there to help me out. This is how we learn during the springtime of our lives, that wonderful time of newness and growth.

I remember being a young adolescent of about twelve, starting the physical changes of becoming an adult. It was scary and uncertain, and many of the things on my mind were hard to share with adults. These things were best shared with mentoring older girls. As the summer of our lives begins, so does our time to branch out. My life in that summery time was consumed with education—high

school, college, and medical school. There were science and scientific thought. Logic. I learned all about what it meant to become a woman and a mother—scientifically speaking, anyway.

I learned that as an embryo yet in my mother's womb, my ovaries were formed and supplied with a great abundance of eggs. I also learned that even before I was born, a good number of those eggs had already died: In essence, we are born already dying. I took this as just another scientific fact, something to know for the exam and not really much else. I also learned that at about the age of twelve, as maturation continues, we begin to cycle hormonally. It is at this time that we begin to have the ability to reproduce, and at this time that we experience many changes, both physically and emotionally. Menopause, I was taught, was the end of the cyclic hormonal changes, the end of the egg supply, the end of childbearing potential—the beginning of the end—the fall and winter of life.

Beyond a Sense of Fall Leading into Winter

There are many people whose understanding of menopause stops right about there, including many of my medical colleagues. But I am a Christian woman, a Lutheran woman, and that greatly affects my understanding of how I see God, how I see creation, and how I see myself. I no longer see these stages in women's lives as merely "seasons." I see them as expressions of our creativity with God.

But how does this idea apply to menopause? I believe that menopause is not just an ending, not a descent from summer into fall into winter; it is a part of the stewardship entrusted to us, another part of our creativity with God. Menopause is God's own way of ensuring that all our children are adequately taken care of, cared for, nurtured, comforted, sustained, and guided until they are mature Christian adults in their own right.

Although it's factually true that our reproductive lives have come to an end at menopause, our time of mentoring, of teaching, of interceding with prayerful lives, flowers. Menopause is definitely a time of change, both physically and emotionally. It can be likened to a mirror image of the changes that took place when we each moved into our adulthood. We can step back into our time of wonder and take risks that we dared not take when we were in our summer years of education, career building, and perhaps courting and child rearing.

We can choose to connect with a younger person and share our life's stories, our treasures and tragedies. And in our mentoring and teaching, we will be ministering to the next generation the glory of God. It seems to me that menopause is, in the language of the seasons, an autumn time, a harvest time. Scripture teaches us that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. This is our time to shine as laborers for God's harvest.

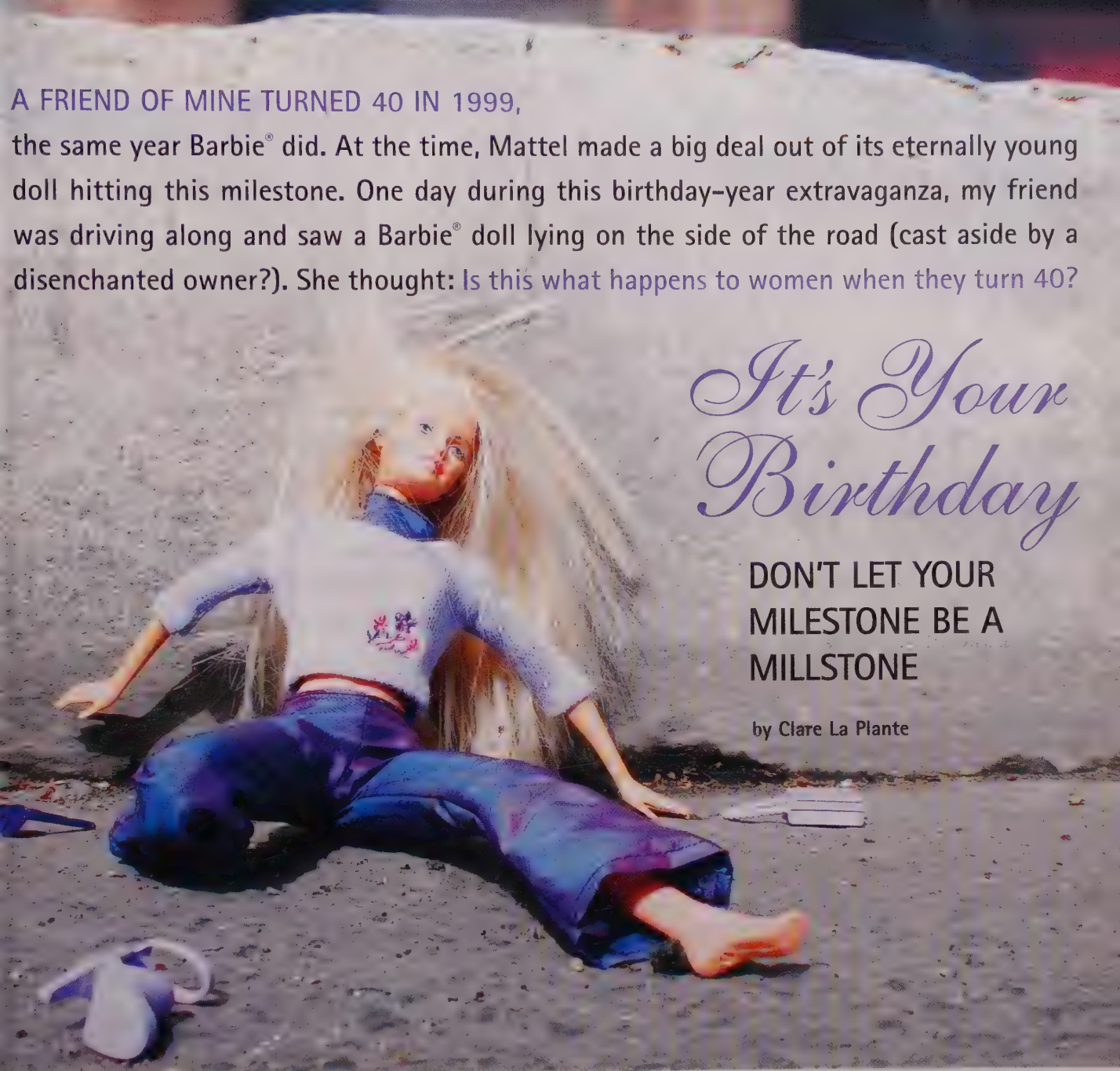
"Wait," you might say, "aren't you forgetting about some of the uncomfortable changes that come with this time of life?" Part of my answer to that might be to ask in return, "When is change ever really comfortable?" We are fortunate to be living in this time and place, to have the advances in medical science that offer many ways of easing the troublesome physical symptoms. This time of change, as uncomfortable as it sometimes is, is also part of God's great gift to us: the gift of womanhood, the gift of being in a very close and very special relationship with God the creator, God the redeemer, and God the sustainer.

The Lutheran Christian woman experiences little winters throughout her entire life. Remember those eggs that die before we are born? Remember our baptism, when we die to the old Adam and rise to new life in Jesus Christ? Remember our Lutheran heritage, which teaches us that we die to ourselves every day, rising to newness of life in baptism every morning? The Lutheran Christian woman never really finds herself stuck in a winter season as long as she—through the grace of God—has faith in Christ, as her Savior keeps the fire of the Holy Spirit alive in her heart and soul. Only if she has allowed her faith and fire to grow cold in some other season will she experience a harsh winter season in her life.

Is menopause just another season of change? No. Menopause should be celebrated as part of our lifelong creativity with God.

Dr. Cynthia J. Scott is married to Dr. Kevin Mocklin and together they have two daughters, Christine and Kathleen. She has had a private gynecology practice for 19 years. She also completed seminary studies at the Lutheran Seminary Program of the Southwest in January 2002. A Master of Divinity degree was conferred on her in May.

A FRIEND OF MINE TURNED 40 IN 1999, the same year Barbie® did. At the time, Mattel made a big deal out of its eternally young doll hitting this milestone. One day during this birthday-year extravaganza, my friend was driving along and saw a Barbie® doll lying on the side of the road (cast aside by a disenchanted owner?). She thought: Is this what happens to women when they turn 40?



It's Your Birthday

DON'T LET YOUR
MILESTONE BE A
MILLSTONE

by Clare La Plante

Well, maybe not. It could just as easily happen at 30, 50, or 60. I did a quick Internet search for birthday cards while writing this article, and the first greetings that popped up for 30th, 40th, and 50th birthdays read respectively, “Feeling a little over the hill?” “Don’t make me say the ‘F’ word,” and (with a sketch of the Grim Reaper) “You can run, but you cannot hide.”

When did the milestones in our lives become sources of shame?

It probably starts young. I loved adventure stories, fairy tales, and mysteries then. In many of the stories I read, from the early fairy tales—Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty—to the stories I read as I grew older—Pippi Longstocking, Nancy Drew—the stories stopped before the heroines grew up; or the girls simply didn’t grow up. Nancy Drew was always 18. The perfect age, I thought; still a girl, but independent.

The older women in many of these stories were hardly mentors, either. Pippi Longstocking's and Nancy Drew's mothers were dead. Many of the fairy-tale older women (usually stepmothers) poisoned, corrupted, ignored, and abused these younger, prettier women, further cementing the notion that bad things happen to women as they age—in addition to losing their looks, their personalities apparently go bad, too.

And then there were the movies. I remember watching *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* one night when I was 13. It is the tale of two aging former movie-star sisters—one hideously decked out in little-girl clothes—played by Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, who take turns tormenting each other in a gloomy Gothic mansion. The idea seemed to be that women grow scary as they grow old. Add your own horror story here.

In some part of my girl psyche, I assumed that older women were not lively, beautiful, or interesting. They might be Miss Marple “cute,” but mostly they were depressing, useless, and pitiful—the abandoned or neglected wife, the has-been star, the embittered old maid. Today, the stories may not be told in such broad strokes, but the message is still clear.

Young women get the plum roles in Hollywood; just look at the Academy Awards. Older actresses occasionally get an award, but the major awards usually go to the youngest. One gets the impression that movie-stardom depends on looks and raw talent (with an emphasis on looks), without the honed craft that comes from years of experience. The last three best actress Academy Awards have gone to Halle Berry, Julia Roberts, Gwyneth Paltrow—ages 34, 33, and 26 respectively, at time of award. Compare this to the men who won best actor awards, Denzel Washington, Russell Crowe, and Roberto Benigni, ages 48, 36, and 46.

Popular magazines do a good job of propping up women as objects, too. This can have devastating

effects. Renowned French make-up artist Laura Mercier says, “I find [American] women even more scared of aging. . . . I see more than 100 women a day when I make personal appearances, and among 100 women, you know what? Not one will say ‘I feel great. I look great.’”

Of course, part of this is economic. Sex, youth, and beauty sell. And the cosmetic, diet, and fashion industries are big business. But it's a form of sexism—America's version of the burqua. This ageism might also have roots in our culture, as well as in marketing. Perhaps the American culture values youth more than others do because as a nation we are young. We value youth at the expense of wisdom, character, and depth.

We ghettoize our elderly—male and female—not just in nursing homes and retirement villages, but also in our neighborhoods and cities. I recently moved out of a fashionable Chicago neighborhood when rising rents priced me out. I miss the lake and the beautiful old trees, but in that neighborhood I didn't see the elderly people I see in my new neighborhood—the old woman who carts her garbage, carefully wrapped, to the bin in the morning. It's like sighting a rare bird. There are the elderly Chinese men and women who move slowly, with meditation, in their morning walks. And there are the elderly Orthodox Jewish men, almost all wearing gym shoes with their dark suits, walking to the local shul—synagogue.

Without integration, role models, and full community, none of us—male or female—is instructed in how to grow older. For women, especially, the cost is high. We learn to lie about our age, whether by cosmetic surgery (which has increased 175 percent since 1992), uncomfortable clothing, or simple obscuring of the truth. I turned 40 this year with trepidation and slight horror. I still mumble when certain people ask me my age, those who I'm afraid will judge me, or make a snide comment, or voice my own worst fears.

These fears are about death, dependency, and aloneness. We all have them. So we separate life and death like the lights and darks in the laundry. However, here's the rub: Death is a part of us from the moment we are born, and it is necessary for a full life. If we hold our breath, like children wanting our own way, or like women not wanting to appear mature, to prevent the passing of time and the changes that life inevitably brings, we're caught in the netherworld between life and death—going through the motions but not really showing up.

When we face this fear, we can start to live. Life is hard, but if we live it fully, death will feel like part of the journey. Buddhists meditate on impermanence and death; Christians do, too, especially during Lent. "Remember, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return." We need to keep this meditation year round.

Fighting ageism is sacred work.

For the other type of death, the kind that comes to women who feel invisible after a certain age, we can be part of a movement that takes back the night, so to speak, as well as the afternoon and evening hours of life. We need to look around: Some of the fastest women now competing in triathlons are in their 40s—perhaps it's from consistency and strength built up over the years. It's almost a cliché, but Grandma Moses really did begin painting in her late 70s. Sophia Loren is radiantly beautiful at 70-plus, and Vanda Scaravelli, a movement and yoga teacher, began her practice in her 60s and kept it up until she died at age 99.

More important, perhaps, are the role models around us—our mothers, aunts, neighbors, teachers, and friends, who survive divorce, gray hair, cancer, crow's-feet, and youth with spirit and grace. These are our best reminders of who we are, the best way to see

ourselves as daughters of God. "These are the soul's changes," said Virginia Woolf. "I don't believe in aging. I believe in forever altering one's aspect to the sun."

Fighting ageism is sacred work. We need to do it for our daughters, nieces, granddaughters, sisters, friends, ourselves. We have to look hard at our own illusions and negative perceptions. Support the arts that celebrate older and younger women. Wear comfortable shoes that keep you in touch with the earth. Refuse to modify yourself for others. Mentor a younger woman. Take a hint from make-up and beauty professional Mercier, who refuses to consider plastic surgery. "I am scared to death not to find myself anymore, not to find my expression."

Let that be our greatest fear: Not to find ourselves or our expressions. Let's honor life in all its stages. We were made to grow old, yet there is no

safe route except through faith and spirit. Then we can reap age's benefits—calmness, wisdom, humor, peace, more depthful beauty. We can become part of the great *dénouement* of life, as we grow into our own skins, into our own selves: Here I am, here I am more, and finally, here I really am.

Dismissing others or ourselves as we age is a serious transgression. It is saying that an old house should be knocked down simply because it is not new, like saying that everything is replaceable. It is not. No life is replaceable, not one year, not one day, not one minute. If we dismiss ourselves as we age, we dismiss the handiwork of God. Instead of looking back at the end of a life well-lived and asking, "Did I live it well?" let's try doing it daily: "Did I live this day well?" And by staying in its moments, we can age with grace.

Clare La Plante is a Chicago-area writer and reporter.

From the Parent's heart

DEVOTIONALS FOR OUR CHILDREN

THREE DIFFERENT PARENTS with children at three different stages of life reflect on their children and their relationships with them. These three devotionals give a glimpse into the uniqueness of each family, yet will ring true in the heart of every parent. Perhaps you'll see yourself in their words. —the editors

STAGE ONE INFANCY

by Carisa Owsia

OH, LITTLE BABY, how I love to look at you. You are fascinating to me. It was only a few months ago that I carried you in

me. Wherever I went, you came along inside my belly. I marveled as I felt you growing inside me. I smiled as I felt you kick or stretch. I did not yet know you, but I loved you. I cared for you as I ate healthy food and made certain I was rested. I thought of you as I walked to the bus so I would get some exercise.

You were with me every second of every day and night, and I loved you so. All the while you were there, I prayed for your safety, and I prayed that I would be giving you what you needed. I prayed as I worked, as I rode the train home, as I waited to fall asleep each night. I turned you over to God even then, knowing that God's protection and watchful eye would keep you safe.



When the day came for you to be born, I was filled with wonder and awe. You burst into this world, wide-eyed and strong. Such joy I had never felt before. There you were, a perfect baby, ready to explore all that awaited on “the other side of the belly.” I saw your sweet face, your long legs and tiny hands. You slept so quietly and gently. Even your cries were like little songs that made me smile. We wrapped you in the softest clothes and carefully carried you home. Time passed, and we still could not stop looking at you. You were amazing to us, and we tried to memorize everything about you, knowing you’d soon grow. We continued to pray for your safety. Now we have added to our prayers hopes for your healthy growth and your safekeeping as you start to explore this world.

This morning as I dressed you for the day, I noticed your clothes are a little snug. It is almost time to move to the next size. At times I think you grow another inch from the time we tuck you in at night until we come to get you with the first morning light. You are amazing! I see your arms and legs, already so strong and eager to learn. Where will they take you? What will you reach for? You sit up like you’ve been doing it for years, yet it has

only been a few weeks. I hear you laugh, and I laugh. That laugh of yours—so infectious and so heartwarming—stays with me all day.

Now as I sit at my desk and work, or ride the train to the city, or wait to fall asleep each night, I continue to pray for you. I know that the themes in my prayers will certainly grow and change, just as you do. But I also know we have

the assurance that God is by our side. We are not doing this alone. Dear God, bless this child and keep us in your watchful gaze. Help us keep her safe, healthy, and strong. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Carisa Ocasio works at a Chicago university. She and her family enjoy their time together, whether they are at home or out exploring.

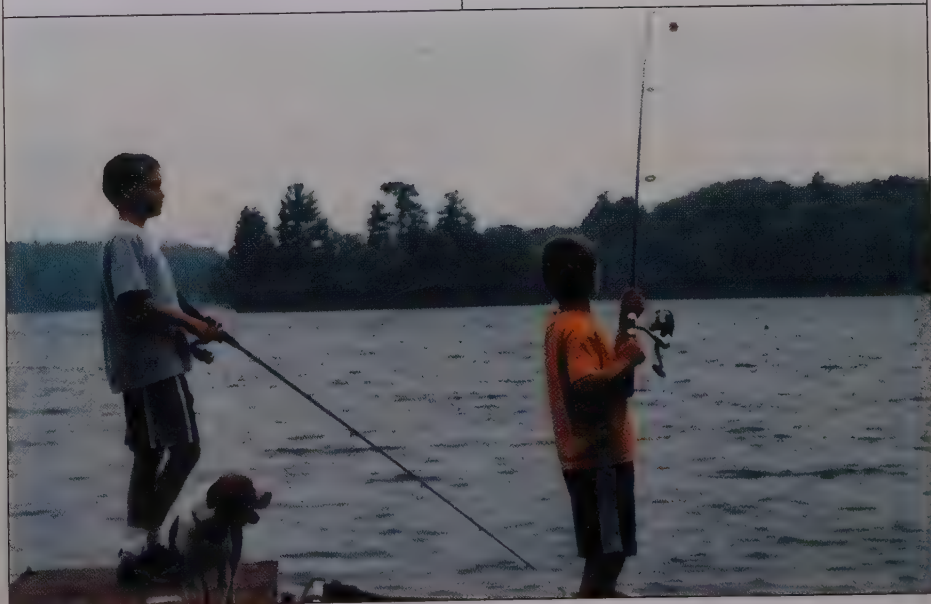
STAGE TWO ADOLESCENCE

by Daniel L. Bohman

DEAR GOD,
My son turned into a teenager three weeks ago; thank you for this gift. He joked, “I’m a teenager. I have to get some drugs!” We know his sense of humor and laughed with him.

But when the laughter stopped, the worry set in. Yes, he has a

good head on his shoulders, yet the day will come when drugs will not be an abstract joke but a real possibility. Lord, help Ann and me to build a godly foundation underneath him, so that when that day comes, he can stand strong. And girls are beginning to call and stop by. For the time being, since they



don't look like footballs, baseballs, or basketballs, he isn't interested. But Lord, we all know that that won't last much longer either. Give us the Spirit's power to teach him to respect himself and others the way you desire.

My other son, 10-year-old Andy, came home right before Christmas after playing with a classmate and informed us that his friend's family didn't celebrate Christmas or believe in Jesus. They celebrated Yule, by burning a Yule log and sharing presents. Would we explain that? We did the best we could, as we weren't really anticipating this question. Andy listened carefully to what we had to say. When we finished explaining Christmas and Yule, and discussing the differences people have in understanding Jesus (or choosing to ignore him), Andy said, "Oh, okay," and walked off into the other room to play with his brother. We smiled at him, but our smiles faded with his shadow. We know that the day will come when we will not be right there to answer all his questions, nor will he be nearly as accepting of our words as he is now. Bless us, O Lord, so that when questions arise, his footing will be firm in you.

We are blessed to have a wonderful life, with worries like any

other family and few that have come to reality. We are a close, loving family, and both our boys know that home is always a safe and grace-filled place. We live in a town where kids still don't lock up their bikes when they ride them to school. Inside, they still don't have locks on their lockers.

We are a part of a church community that, because of its size, knows and cares for everyone. Lee and Andy are not only active in Sunday school, they are already active leaders in the worship service. They see the church as one happy family.

But the day will come when they will not be protected as they are today. Their surroundings will change, new friends will

come and go, and they will be touched by a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, smells, and beliefs. Their way of life will be challenged, and temptations will surround them as they surrounded your son Jesus in the wilderness.

We pray, Lord, that you bless our time together. Help us to enable our children to bear holy fruit, and when they do leave home, may they be blessed with footing on the rock of their salvation. In your Son's name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Daniel L. Bohlman, a rural minister for almost 15 years, is pastor of Yellowstone and Apple Grove Lutheran churches. He and his family live in Argyle, Wisc.

STAGE THREE YOUNG ADULTHOOD

by Sue Edison-Swift

MY DAUGHTER ANNIE wanted my comments on her final revisions to an application for a prestigious graduate-school scholarship "right away, please. I need to drop it off in 10 minutes."

The rushed telephone conversation ended with me saying, "Kiss it goodbye. No matter what, it's been a good process," and with Annie answering, "Don't set me up for failure like that."

Ouch. Oh, God. Growing up is hard.

Annie may be 21 and I may be 48, but our relationship is going through serious adolescence. Push and pull, independence and dependence, separation and bonding: It's the latest twist on the mother-daughter dance that began with her birth. It's all perfectly natural and perfectly understandable—in theory. Help

my heart catch up with my head.
Help me “let go and let grow.”

I find being the parent of a young adult a little lonely. There aren't three books on my shelf titled *Raising Your 21-Year-Old*. I could use a good reference on older-parent dancing lessons—step in here, step out there. I remember being more confident when Annie was the adolescent, not our relationship; when Annie was 13, my parental role was clearer, and the consequences of missteps were less serious.

In 1988, when I first heard “I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry,” John Ylvisaker's great hymn, I used to smile at the phrase, “in a blaze of light you wandered off to find where demons dwell.” Back then, wandering off to “where demons dwell” brought to mind my own youthful forays onto dangerous ground. In 2002, when it's Annie doing the wandering, that phrase is downright scary. Oh, she's growing up in a dangerous age. Guardian God, protect Annie. Help her find her way safely through places where demons dwell.

Here's a multiple-choice question for parents of older children, based on Ecclesiastes 3 (“For everything there is a time”). When you are parenting a young adult, is it time to

- (b) build up,
- (c) weep,
- (d) laugh,
- (e) embrace, or
- (f) refrain from embracing?

The answer is, of course, (g) all of the above. Redeeming Savior, I confess that sometimes my timing is off. I take some things too seriously and others not seriously enough.

Annie likes to remind her dad, Paul, and me that we've pulled easy parent duty, and she's right. Annie is the best: She's smart, talented, funny, passionate—interesting. I not only love this person, I like her—I really, really like her. The bottom line is I don't have Annie in my life nearly as much as I want, and of course, that's how it should be. Thank you, gracious God, for Annie.

I know it's a luxury to be able to think about the adolescence of parenting a 21-year-old

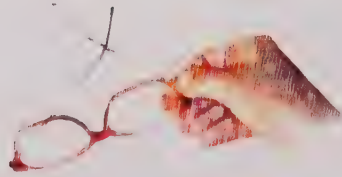
when there are children and parents bearing sorrows too deep for words. Loving God, pour out your comforting Spirit on those who suffer.

Annie and I just finished an Instant Messaging conversation (that's a real-time conversation on the computer, typing back and forth). She gave me a quick update on her work as a teaching assistant, which made me type “LOL” (laugh out loud) twice. We closed in the usual way for our family—by each typing “MWAH!”—the sound of a big kiss.

Ahhh! Oh God, growing up is great. Amen.

Sue Edison-Swift and her husband, Paul, live in Park Ridge, Ill., where they are members of St. Luke's Lutheran. Sue serves as assistant director for ELCA colleges and universities.





READER CALL

Momentous Transitions

A Chance Meeting?

One summer day in San Francisco, I received an unexpected gift from God. It was the gift of an epiphany on the very day I decided to give up my dream of being a poet.

I was living in San Diego at the time. The move from the Northeast, where I was born and raised, to the West Coast had been a big one. Alone and afraid, I became restless and decided to get away to Northern California and meet an author friend on her book tour. During the tour, I made the decision to stop writing.

When I discussed my decision with my friend, she was alarmed. But I continued to explain my decision, saying that poetry as a career is for the birds: The pay is lousy and the hours are long. I felt that obstacles such as health, mobility, and money were preventing me from furthering my work.

Soon after my friend left, I stopped at a local deli. As I was looking for the shortest checkout line, I noticed a stately African American woman at one of the registers. She turned around and smiled when I approached the line. Maya Angelou! The world-famous poet, Maya Angelou, was standing right in front of me!

Without even saying hello, she asked my name. "My name is minerva (my pen name, with a small 'm'), and I'm a poet," I replied.

When she heard me say I was a poet, she beamed. She put the divider down on the conveyor belt. With a welcoming wave of her hand, she said gleefully, "Well, step on up!"

Those few minutes we chatted were divine. It was as if God had carved out this sacred space just for us, at this particular point in time, at this cross-road in my life.

As she gave the cashier her credit card, Ms. Angelou seemed a bit awkward in her fame. I noticed that the cashier and a few other shoppers had no idea who this national treasure was: poet, actress, singer, professor, and so much more.

By the time I arrived at church the next Sunday, I had reconciled with my gift of writing. As I told my pastor, "There is no way I would have missed the message to rethink my decision to stop writing." I didn't stop. I started anew. Ms. Angelou was kind enough to write a message for me on the back of my pocket computer's manual (the only thing available for an autograph). "Poet on in joy!" she wrote. So I did.

I soon finished the manuscript of the children's book I had been working on for several years. I also completed a lesson plan and workshop on music and poetry. I have since conducted workshops in classrooms, at conferences, and in prisons. What a ministry my poetic voice has become.

An epiphany emerged from what at first seemed a chance meeting in a supermarket. Transitions can be blessings, and some blessings from God are not in disguise.

Gail N. Hawkins—San Diego, California

Waiting for a “Call”

In 1994, I had completed my training as a diaconal minister and was ready for a call. A friend said one day, “You could serve the congregation in Inuvik very well.” Inuvik, which is beyond the Arctic Circle, seemed like the end of the earth. But I sensed that this friend’s comment could be a call from God that would change my life.

I prayed and read the scriptures as I sought what to do. I did a lot of talking with God and with friends, both clergy and lay. I watched their reactions and listened to their advice. I evaluated what they said against my own thoughts, knowledge, and feelings. I examined my conscience and relied on my intuition.

This would, indeed, be a momentous change in my life, as I would be moving 2,500 miles away to an isolated community where the climate and seasons are extreme: 24 hours of daylight in the summer and total darkness in the winter.

But throughout the discernment process, I sensed a peace. I knew that God’s word was true, and I had the assurance that “God would be with me” throughout my stay in the north. And God was! It proved to be a move that changed my life and my ministry. It brought me into a closer, deeper relationship with God and with others.

Margaret Olson—Boyle, Canada

Discovering a New Assurance

My mother lived with me, my husband, and our two teenage sons for the last few years of her life as she struggled with Alzheimer’s. I could share with you how my faith shaped my decision to care for her, how it sustained and guided me, how it allowed us to keep a sense of humor and respond graciously when someone was condescending or unkind to her, but perhaps just as great was the role my faith played after her death, for that was a time of transition as well. I was never more acutely aware of God’s comforting presence. He was my refuge and strength, an ever-present help; but he didn’t stop there.

The weekend of the funeral brought about the usual reminiscing and the stories that brought both laughter and tears. Even some skeletons were brought out of the closet for dusting. And through these conversations, God showed me that even in times past when I felt totally alone, I was never

really alone at all. In every transition and trouble in my life, I was never separated from God—and what lengths God went to in order to prove that to me! That knowledge was a gift I could never have anticipated. I discovered the new assurance that God is with me always, through death and through the best and worst this life has to offer. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Jane Dailey—Chadron, Nebraska

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See page 43 for future
Reader Call topics and deadlines.



JUMPING OFF A CLIFF

SOME THOUGHTS ON LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

by Christiana Lundholm

In many ways, graduating from college was like jumping off a cliff. Except that if I really had jumped off a cliff, I would have had at least some expectation of what was going to happen to me when I hit the bottom.

Looking back on what my expectations were as I was facing this next stage of my life, I find it hard to put a name to them. Forming some expectations are inevitable, but I think I intentionally tried to form as few as possible as I was preparing to leave Luther College. I had no qualms (and still don't) about telling anxious inquirers that I genuinely didn't know what I was going to wind up doing with my life. In some sense, I wanted the future I was stepping into to be free to shape itself, without the burden of too many of my guidelines.

With that said, however, life in the "real world" has certainly presented both challenges and opportunities that I couldn't have anticipated. I chose to join Lutheran Volunteer Corps (LVC) after graduation.

LVC is focused on three tenets: social justice, intentional community, and simplified living. I was given a volunteer placement at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) in Baltimore, Maryland, where I assist in the coordination of national advocacy efforts on behalf of people in immigration detention. In ordinary times, immigration is an extraordinarily complex and difficult issue. The post-September 11 climate in our country hasn't made it any easier. Aside from my job, the structure of LVC itself poses challenges. Living with four other people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and opinions—all unknown to me before last August—is not always easy. And the struggle to live simply in a world that is ever more focused on consuming is an ongoing battle.

Add into this whole mix that I had just left college, and I think you may see what an incredible time of transition I leapt into. Even if none of these other things had been going on, I still would have just left behind many of my closest friends and a place I loved, where I was both secure and challenged. Not long after I moved to Baltimore to begin LVC, I felt as if a huge chunk had just been ripped out of my

life, leaving a gaping hole that I didn't know how to fill. That feeling has dissipated a bit over time, but whenever I run across someone that I knew before I began LVC, I still feel like I'm having flashbacks from a past life. My friends out here know me fairly well as the person that I am now, and I am grateful that I can be myself with them. But there is still, at least in some respect, an enormous disconnect that springs out of this situation: none of the people with whom I spend my days now have been a part of my growth from the person that I was.

Lest I risk sounding too depressed at this point, I have to add that in spite of its sometimes daunting challenges, my cliff-jumping expedition has also proven rewarding beyond my wildest dreams. I've been given the chance to explore a new part of the country and to make new and lifelong friends. And my work at LIRS is more than a job; it fulfills a passion. The stories I hear every day are unbelievably compelling: people—asylum seekers, survivors of torture, children, legal permanent residents—who come to this country seeking nothing more than a chance to live free from fear and who often wind up spending months and sometimes years behind bars without ever having committed a crime. I know that what I do matters. That is immensely rewarding.

My transition would have been much more difficult had I not been privileged to have several opportunities for travel while I was in college. My education was in many ways a global one, and the awareness I gained pushes me constantly to see the systemic injustices I am a part of, and which I struggle to change. I am connected now to people and places I couldn't have imagined when I began, by experiences I couldn't possibly forget. This is both a joy and a responsibility.

But it wasn't just my time away from Luther that prepared me for leaving it; the time that I spent there

also made its contributions. Luther is a place where people think and talk a lot about community. This made me begin to think about community early on. I am very much aware that I live all the time in the community of friends, family, church, neighborhood—all within the larger community of the world as a whole. Anything I learned in my experience of community at Luther, anything I learn during my LVC year, are all lessons that apply to community for the rest of my life. I know that I did not become the person I am in isolation. I have benefited from all whom I have had the opportunity with which to interact.

What would I share with those who are about to leave college and embark on a new stage of their life? First of all, do what you are passionate about. That is priority one. The reason I find my job exciting and empowering is that I am passionate about justice. I can't imagine doing anything better than working toward justice for all. Number two: although I haven't landed yet, the jump thus far hasn't been too bad. I have a few bruises, but on the whole it's been an adventure. Enjoy!

Christiana Lundholm graduated in 2001 from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, with a degree in English. She is currently participating in the Lutheran Volunteer Corps in Baltimore, with a placement at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.



Christiana with fellow Luther students Joy Halverson (left) and Megan Johnson (right) in St. Petersburg, Russia, April 1999

Session 1

Gifted and Called



by Bishop Margaret Payne

LWT's summer study is written by three of the female bishops of the ELCA. Bishop Payne will present her session at the Triennial Gathering.

Study Texts

Ephesians 4:4–5, 7, 11–13; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Matthew 25:14–30

Overview

We find our unique place in God's plan as we pay close attention to the ways in which God is calling us. God calls all of us into lives that not only draw forth our best selves but also build up the church and serve the world. Each one of us has been given gifts for ministry, and we grow in faith as we claim our giftedness and give ourselves to the work of Christ in the world.

In this session we ponder the mystery of our role in God's plan by studying key verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesians and the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

Opening

Begin the session by praying the offertory prayer that we use in the liturgy each week:

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us—our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, God Is Calling

Our gifts shape the good works that God has planned as our way of life. In the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul reminds us that all believers have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Ephesians 1:10).

1. Name a gift that God has given you.

An Invitation into Mystery

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul repeatedly mentions mystery. He talks about the mystery of God's will, the mystery of Christ, and God's mysterious invitation into a way of life that has been planned for us since the beginning of time. It is comforting when Paul, who never seemed uncertain about anything, talks about mystery.

The use of the word “mystery” here is different from our modern understanding. Today, we most often understand mystery as a puzzling story or circumstance. But in the Bible, mystery is the amazing and ongoing revelation of God's loving way with the world and with us. We understand God's mysteries with our hearts, not our minds, as we live in God's word and listen for God's call. As we hear and respond, we become part of the mystery.

One of the mysteries of faith is the act of self-giving. God's self-giving was most clear in the gift of Jesus Christ, but God also gives faith, love, life, and all the possessions and relationships that support and sustain us. We find our deepest connection to God as we receive these gifts gratefully and then respond by giving ourselves. It's part of the mystery—the more we give of ourselves, the more joy and fulfillment we will receive and the more deeply we move into the life of God.

2. **Remember a time when you gave of yourself and were surprised to receive more than you had given.**

God's Gifted People

Numerous passages in the Bible assure us that God bestows a holy giftedness on each believer. Our faith in Jesus and our willingness to participate in God's mysteries help us to trust that God gives us gifts. The journey of discovery and cultivation of these gifts is one of the main ways that we grow spiritually. Our obedience to God's will is shaped by our awareness of our gifts and is demonstrated by our use of them.

3. **Read Ephesians 4:7. The translation of this verse in the Contemporary English Version is: "Christ has generously divided out his gifts to us." How does the idea of generosity help us to understand God's love for us? Name some people who embody Christ's generosity who have touched your life.**

The individual gift that each person has been given is the same in one way: It is the light of Christ in us. But there are many versions of

Christ's light in his followers because there are many kinds of people with differing skills, vocations, and personality types. The first step in discerning our gifts is getting to know ourselves and trusting God's promise that we contain a holy giftedness that is waiting to be revealed and a light that is longing to shine. God does not want us to compare ourselves with others but to discover the ways that we have been individually equipped to give glory to God.

Earlier in Ephesians, Paul reminds us that we have been "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 1:10). Each one of us is a creation story. God is at work in us throughout our lives, creating, shaping, evoking, and developing our gifts to enrich the life of the church. As we gather in our congregations, we are called to look for these gifts in one another, celebrate them, and weave them together into the mysterious fabric of our shared life.

4. **Choose one person in the group whom you know, and tell her a gift that you see in her that she may not see in herself. After she has an opportunity to respond, she will then choose another person, and name a gift in that person. Continue until each person in the group has been included in the naming of gifts.**

Sometimes we might be blind to our own gifts and struggle to see ways that we can contribute to God's work. It is important that we help each other identify and claim our gifts—and then hold one another accountable to develop them. A holy attentiveness to God's gifts among us is one of the things that stirs up the power of the Holy Spirit in our congregations.

5. **Read Ephesians 4:11 and compare it with 1 Corinthians 12:28. Any listing of gifts in the Bible is incomplete. The “talking” gifts of teaching, preaching, and evangelism are just examples. Name some gifts that can be given without talking. Is your primary gift a talking gift or a non-talking gift?**

New Gifts for the Church

The church has not always done a good job of recognizing and using the gifts of God’s people. But the Bible tells us that God is infinitely creative and continually gives gifts that can help the church to grow in wonderful new ways. Just because a gift you find in yourself or in a sister of faith is not among those listed in the Bible does not mean that it is not from God. The established patterns of authority and ministry are transformed when we explore our giftedness and create new ways of living and working in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we may think that we have identified a God-given gift but then feel discouraged if we fail when we try to use it in the congregation. It is the responsibility of the community of faith to comfort us and to encourage us to keep trying. We may need to work harder on developing our gift, or we may need to identify another gift. It takes courage and love to do the hard work of discernment and cultivation. We cannot do it alone.

6. **Read Ephesians 4:11–13. How do God’s gifts equip us for the work of ministry and lead to unity in the church? How do they enable us to build up the Body of Christ?**

Many congregations now use a Spiritual Gift Inventory to help identify people’s gifts. This

allows for the ministry of the congregation to be shaped by the gifts and not by a listing of the tasks that must be done. This can lead to a much more dynamic and personal experience for living your faith. It is especially important to help one another recognize and develop gifts because the church needs to grow in new directions in order to proclaim the Gospel in the world today.

The full development of God-given gifts always carries us beyond the church and into the world. Each believer who cherishes and develops spiritual gifts becomes a powerful witness who brings the light of Christ into the darkness of the world. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians that God is at work in us so that we may “shine like stars in the world” (Philippians 2:15). We are accountable to God for the use of our gifts throughout our lives and throughout the world. Identifying our gifts is only the first step.

Out of Hiding

7. **Read Matthew 25:14–30. Why do you think the master gave differing amounts of “talents” to his servants? What were the emotions of the servant who received the single talent and hid it? Have you ever hidden a gift that you have been given by God? Why?**

Usually we think of sinfulness as doing a wrong or hurtful thing. But another kind of sinfulness is burying or turning away from God’s gifts to us. When we do that, we are turning away from God.

Too often women believe that the only appropriate gifts they can offer are the ones that provide background support for the work of the church. They think that such serving shows humility. It is true that all ministries are

precious in God's sight, but true humility means being completely open to whatever God asks of us, no matter how unlikely or frightening it may seem at first. Sometimes the most effective leaders and decision-makers in the church are those people who never imagined they had the gift of leadership until the community called it forth.

In her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard describes an experience that transformed her completely. She describes the impact of her experiences as though she had been a bell for her whole life, but never knew it—until the moment when she was lifted and struck.

We are transformed by the life of God in us. We are revealed as gifted people who never knew our gifts until we allowed God to show them to us. One of the greatest joys of the Christian life is the amazing discovery of unexpected gifts.

Closing Reflection

Dig down into your heart and uncover a hope or dream. Pray about it. Ask God if it is a hidden gift that you should develop. Consider sharing your thoughts with a close friend in faith. What would you gain if you claimed that gift? What would you have to give up? How can you offer it to your community of faith?

The discovery and use of our God-given gifts is one of the most mysterious parts of the journey of faith. We make this journey with friends and we travel in the company of the Holy Spirit, who guides us, supports us, and comforts us. Once we accept God's invitation, we are on our way to the joy and wholeness that is possible for those who love Jesus Christ and have been called according to his purpose.

Opening: Introduction and hymn (5 minutes)

After praying the offertory prayer, ask the participants to take a moment to reflect silently on the fact that we are gifted by God and given as gifts to the church and the world. We grow spiritually as we use our gifts to respond to God with joyful confidence. Read or sing together "God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending" (LBW 408).

Listen, God Is Calling (5 minutes)

Ask the participants to introduce themselves and name one gift that they believe God has given them. It does not have to be a gift that has already been recognized in the congregation. Encourage people to respond quickly with the first thought that comes to mind.

An Invitation into Mystery (5 minutes)

Sometimes it is hard to figure out the details of the daily life of faith. It reminds us that faith is not an intellectual exercise, but a matter of heart and spirit. We grow spiritually as we pray, read the Bible, receive nourishment from the sacraments, and give ourselves to God's work.

Ask for a couple of volunteers in your group to share their experience of giving of themselves and being surprised to receive more than they had given. If you have a story of your own that you would like to tell, share it first to get things rolling.

God's Gifted People (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share other versions of Ephesians 4:7 with the group, if anyone is using other translations of the Bible. The main idea to emphasize is the abundance of gifts that Jesus gives. Humans tend to dole out gifts sparingly,

but God pours out gifts beyond what we can imagine. As participants reflect on people in their lives who have embodied God's generosity, they catch a glimpse of the holiness of the generous giving of self. (5 minutes)

Often it is easier to identify the gifts in other people than to see our own gifts. Sometimes we cannot recognize them because they are so familiar to us or because they seem to have little value. It is a wonderful affirmation, and sometimes an astonishing surprise, to hear what others have recognized as a gift. Doing the exercise in Question 4 can be quite a revelation and provide people with whole new perspectives. (10 minutes)

Remind participants to include differing kinds of gifts—the ability to listen well, generosity, patience, teaching, cooking, athletic ability, leadership skills, sensitivity, cheerfulness—the list is endless.

Number 5 is an interesting question. Some gifts we are likely to categorize as “non-talking,” for example, are the ability to listen well and patience; some definite “talking” gifts might be leadership skills and teaching. But are the gifts that your group has named really so easily categorized? If time permits, discuss how the same gift can take on different kinds of presences.

New Gifts for the Church (10 minutes)

The word “equipped” has a double meaning in the passage that we examine in Question 6. First, to be equipped means to be supplied with what is needed; God supplies the church for the work of ministry by giving gifts to the people. But the word “equip” also means to prepare, create, and restore. God not only gives the gifts that are needed to do the work of Christ, but

cares for us in the process. We who receive these gifts are transformed into entirely new creations. Our willingness to share in God's work puts us more completely in God's hands and restores our spirits.

Out of Hiding (15 minutes)

Jesus told the story of the three servants as an encouragement to take risks with our gifts and skills. Consider reading the story aloud with different people speaking the words of the different characters. Explore the emotions of each character.

The third servant in the story was fearful and ended up losing the one talent that he had and being cast into a dark and terrible place. It seems like a cruel punishment just for playing it safe, but God does not want us to play it safe with the gifts that we have been given. We may be fearful or embarrassed or immobilized, but we are called to move beyond our resistance and claim our gifts so that we can “enter into the joy” (v. 21, 23) that God is yearning for us to experience.

Have a good conversation about gifts participants have kept hidden.

Closing (5 minutes)

God calls us and gives gifts for ministry. Conclude the session with a prayer that includes a moment of silence, and then an invitation for participants to reflect on a gift in themselves that they want to celebrate or develop. Give thanks and praise to God for these gifts, and pray for the strength to support one another in the development of them.

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PANGANI LUTHERAN CHILDREN'S CENTER

by Anne Basye

Until she was 11, Phyllis Nyagothie never went to school. Instead, she spent her days helping her mother and grandmother sell *changaa* on street corners in Nairobi, Kenya. Selling the illicit brew was dangerous work. "When customers were drunk, I was in constant danger of being abused," she remembered.

By day, Phyllis cooked and cleaned or wandered the streets with girls in similar situations; by night, she stayed home alone while her mother worked. "I cried all night wondering why life was so cruel," she said. "At times I got so scared I sneaked to my neighbor's house to spend the night. My mother punished me. She was afraid thieves might break in and steal our belongings. I was afraid they would break in and steal me!"

Life changed when her dying mother arranged for her to become a day student at the Pangani Lutheran Children's Center (PLCC).

Coordinated by the Women's Desk of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), the PLCC cares for 70 girls between the ages of 3 and 20. While some are homeless or orphaned, most are like Phyllis, with parents or guardians who are no longer able to care for them.

PLCC began when women of the KELC noticed that while many programs served boys living on the streets of Nairobi, none served girls. Using thankofferings from their local congregations, the women hired Mary Mshana, a young Tanzanian, as

director. Under her direction, the PLCC has come alive, offering health education, literacy, music, art, Bible study, and sports. All the girls who have learned to read are placed in local classrooms. The girls learn that they are valuable and are loved by God, and many participate in the local church choir and attend confirmation. Parent/guardian seminars offer counsel on HIV/AIDS, family planning, and mother-daughter relationships.

The Pangani Center's goal is to help girls live full and productive lives and reunite them with their families in stable situations. To address this challenge, Pangani offers technical assistance to relatives and guardians and micro loans for developing small businesses. Many of the 46 parents and guardians who have participated are already in business.

PLCC is one of many programs initiated and carried out by the Women's Desk of the Kenyan Lutheran Church. For girls like Phyllis, the women's work has paid off. "In PLCC, I've found a bigger and loving family than I thought would be in the world," says Phyllis.

Anne Basye is associate director for global resources in the ELCA Division for Global Mission.

Dare to Live God's Promise at 2002 Global Mission Events

Projects like the Pangani Lutheran Children's Center are celebrated at the annual Global Mission Events, coming July 18-21 at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina, and July 25-28 at the Minneapolis Convention Center and Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis,

Minnesota. Download a packet and registration

form from www.elca.org/dgm or call the

ELCA Division for Global Mission at

800-638-3522, ext. 2642.



GRABBING LIFE

Aging with Adventure

by Kathleen Hall



We are all multidimensional beings, blessed with unique talents and gifts. Unfortunately, we don't come with user's manuals to help us make the most of our blessings.

I recently caught up with Emily Kimball, the "Aging Adventurer." At 70, Emily is truly an inspiration for making the most of one's life. Her numerous outdoor adventures include riding her bike across the United States at age 62, and continuing to hike the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine in 250-mile increments.

How long have you been participating in these outdoor adventures?

Since I was a child and went to camp. But it wasn't until I was in my forties and facing a divorce that I really began to actively pursue my passion and love for the outdoors.

So your divorce was a catalyst of sorts?

Stress was, and there are many causes of stress; divorce is just one. Stress can just as easily stem from money troubles, career burn-out, empty-nest

syndrome, or retirement. Major life stresses often cause us to stop and re-evaluate. I was a newly single mother with three young children. I realized I had to do something for myself and take charge of my life. So I joined the local bicycling club and met other people who liked the same things I did.

How do you blend spirituality into your adventures?

To me, spirituality is about getting in touch with your core self. It's hard to do that when you are busy all the time. Spending time doing something you love is a way to extend your spirituality outside the formal church service. It involves your whole being and all your senses. There's a difference in the silence I experience in my Quaker meeting, where I feel a deep connection with the people, and the silence of the trail, where I feel a deep affinity with nature and the universe.

It's important to find places in life where you are pleased to be, even if it's for just a short period at a time. Find ways to slow your life down—like practicing yoga or tai chi or setting aside daily meditation time. When I go on very long hikes, I am able to forget

about the day-to-day stuff and become very relaxed. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it's something you are passionate about and helps you get to a deeper layer of self.

One of my friends is learning the violin, another is gardening, and another travels abroad and paints. The important thing is to allow yourself this time and to claim responsibility for yourself. We get caught up in the fast-moving river of life, but if we pause to take charge, we can shape what's coming by.

This seems to be especially difficult for women.

I encourage women to take time for things that they love. It's not selfish. It makes you a better mother, worker, wife. You become a more interesting and dimensional being. It's important to be assertive about our needs.

I think it's also important to latch onto things that you really enjoy when you're in your busy middle years. It's good preparation for retirement, when you have the time to take your interests and passions deeper and further.

What are some of your unique gifts, and how do they help you in your life's journey?

Well, I think I have a lot of determination. And I'm definitely a risk-taker. My divorce made me take responsibility for my own life. I went back to work after being a stay-at-home mom for eleven years. Then I quit a high-paying job because it was too bureaucratic. I changed careers so that I could work outdoors.

I'm also a good planner and find ways to make things happen. When I was in my fifties, I had a job I loved, but I burned out. I asked for a sabbatical and got it. I rode my bike around New Zealand. It was so wonderful that I began planning for how I could retire. I retired at 60 and rode my bike across the

country. When I returned, I still needed to make a living, so I started my business, Make It Happen. Now I make presentations to audiences around the country, sharing ideas for aging creatively, taking risks, and making the most of your life.

You make it all sound so easy.

I've found that as you make a change in one area of your life, it opens doors in other areas that maybe you never thought about. I never imagined when I asked for a sabbatical that it would take my life in a new direction. We all have the capacity to take charge, but we don't. We complain or blame others. I see others underestimate what they can do in life. I've had my share of failures, and I've learned valuable lessons from them.

How do you recommend that people stop and grab hold of life?

Find compatible people who share your values and beliefs and support you. Allow yourself time to reflect on your goals. Retreats can provide a good, structured place to reflect and figure out who you are and evaluate where you are headed at different life junctures.

You can reach Emily at Make It Happen! 804-358-5536 or www.TheAgingAdventurer.com. Interested in becoming an Aging Adventurer, too? Call or visit Emily online and get her information-packed booklet, *A Resource Guide For Aging Adventurers: Unusual, Sometimes Inexpensive Opportunities for Volunteering, Learning, Traveling and Adventure* (\$10.60, including postage and handling).

Kathleen Hall is a marketing consultant and freelance writer in Richmond, Virginia.

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

Traversing between Trienniums

by Linda Chinnia and Catherine I.H. Braasch

AS PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WOMEN OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, WE SHARE IN THE PRIDE THAT WOMEN HAVE IN THIS ORGANIZATION. IT IS PRIDE IN THE BEST SENSE OF THE WORD. WE BOAST NOT OF WHAT we're doing. Rather, we glory in what the Holy Spirit is doing in, among, and through Women of the ELCA. And, we are humbled, awe-struck, as this ministry keeps on gathering, growing, and going forward in God's mission.

Not surprisingly, the triennium was grounded in prayer. During Lent 2000, Women of the ELCA went on a lenten prayer journey—40 days of seeking and discovering God's will for renewing this ministry organization in our local settings, our synodical organizations, and church-wide. Every day of the week had its own special prayer petition, its own special color. Women across the church made key chains, bracelets, necklaces, and even prayer flowerpots, to remind them to pray daily for and about Women of the ELCA. Young women made the prayer reminders for their older sisters in Christ. Mothers and daughters prayed across the miles during once-a-week phone calls. Whole congregations joined in the prayer activity as it caught on for congregational and family use. And, as best as we can tell, the prayers continue for the future growth and vitality of Women of the ELCA. Prayer changes things and prepares us for change as well.

During 1999–2002, Women of the ELCA has been making changes such as these:

- We're gathering women's hopes and dreams and growing them into new ministry direction, goals, and action. A new mission statement—To mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ—has captured the imagination of women while complementing the longer, long-treasured purpose statement of this organization. New goals focus on intergenerational ministry, community-building ministries, and action to address pressing issues facing women. New programmatic materials will be previewed at Triennial Gathering and throughout the rest of the triennium.
- We're gathering as women in places we've never had local units, in special units in institutional settings where women cannot participate in the congregation back home. Three units in new ELCA ministries under development have already been recognized, and action on several other applications was pending when this article was written.
- We're expanding our linkages with global neighbors. Our partnership with the ELCA Companion Synod Program continues, and with it, a growing network of global ministry advocates is emerging in

the synodical organizations. Our presence has also been felt through our volunteer and staff delegations to nations and partner churches in Africa, the Middle East, and the Asian sub-continent, and through our global grants programs.

- We're doing our part to maintain inter-Lutheran dialogue. We've continued to work with Lutheran women in Canada through the Lutheran Women's Cooperating Committee, where we share best practices on ministry matters of mutual interest.
- We're continuing our focus on eliminating racism through the Today's Dream, Tomorrow's Reality network of volunteer anti-racism educators. Now in its fifth year, the TDTR network has expanded to virtually all of our 64 synodical women's organizations and attracted interest from our ecumenical partners as well.
- We're bringing a bold new approach and appearance to a 15-year-old favorite, *Lutheran Woman Today*. While the redesigned full-size, full-color format was introduced in September 2001, gradual changes in content began before that.

In the course of promotional efforts, many new potential readers were introduced to *Lutheran Woman Today* in early 2002. A number of congregations (most of whom had been without a volunteer subscription coordinator under the previous subscription model) were introduced to the magazine. Along with a number of new subscribers has come high praise for *Lutheran Woman Today* from those who were seeing the new format for the first time. This increase in circulation not only allows for many more women to become aware of and involved in Women of the ELCA activities and programs, but for continued growth in faith and mission through *LWT*.

- We're preparing for "Young Women Seeing Visions." This Triennial Gathering 2002 track for young women and those who support them in ministry has taken shape under the direction of young women themselves. Participants in Young Women Seeing Visions will shape recommendations for the future of ministry both with young women and through intergenerational approaches.
- We're putting best ideas and practices to work through seven pilot programs that focus on women and children in poverty. In cities like Houston, Chicago, New York, and Milwaukee, and in rural communities in Alabama, Washington, and Ohio, lives and communities are being changed by faithful women responding to the hurts and hopes of women and children.

As proud as we are to be Women of the ELCA, Linda and I are also humbled by the privilege of serving in our respective offices. Both of us will be stepping down this summer. After six years on the churchwide executive board, Linda will install her successor, the other three officers, and 17 board members on July 13 at the Triennial Gathering in Philadelphia. Cathi will step down on August 31, ending five full years as executive director. It's been an amazing time for each of us, an experience that has changed our lives.

We're excited and confident that the best days are yet to come. We began our partnership with the end in sight—a women's ministry organization with the vision and capacity to move ahead in God's mission and women's ministry in ways we can't begin to imagine. We both hope that you will be with us for Triennial Gathering, to celebrate what God has done and continues to do through generation after generation of faithful Lutheran women.



AMEN!

Still Becoming

by Catherine Malotky

ONE DAY, I REALIZED THAT I DID NOT NEED TO BE ASHAMED OF WHAT I HAD NOT YET BECOME. SOMEHOW, I HAD GOTTEN THE IDEA THAT I SHOULD BE FINISHED, AND IF I WAS NOT, IT WAS MY FAULT.

Creating God, thank you for this new vision. I should have known: You fashioned a creation that was not yet finished. Though you rested on the seventh day, what you had done had just begun.

Perhaps I only heard Matthew's command to be perfect as you are perfect (Matthew 5:48), and in it, heard you saying that I had to be perfectly finished. I wish I had heard Luke's way of saying it: Be merciful as you are merciful (Luke 6:36). Of course, I might still have been ashamed that I was not more perfectly merciful.

Or perhaps I heard the writer to the Corinthians explaining, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways" (1 Corinthians 13:11). I wish I had heard Jesus welcome the children to his side and scold the disciples for thinking that he didn't have time for them. "It is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs," he said (Matthew 19:14).

Dear Jesus, you spent your days on earth welcoming sinners and healing any who came to you. You called forth gifts, whether those gifts were newly born or refined by the wisdom of age and experience.

I remember the lepers. "Cleansed," they came back to community, having learned much, I suspect, about being outcasts and living with disease. What gifts did they bring from these insights that made their community more compassionate and whole? I remember the blind man you healed and his powerful witness to your goodness even while the skeptical religious leaders grilled him and his parents about the origins of their sin. What new life lay before him? What new vocation? I remember the woman bent, who had bled for so many years and whose blood made her untouchable in her time. Her courage reached out for the hem of your garment, and she was healed. When she could again touch and be touched, what did she have to teach? What had she learned?

None of these people was finished. In fact, your work made them, in some ways, more undone. Your work opened whole new lives to them, whole new ways to grow, whole new directions to travel.

So this is faithfulness. I will try not to labor against my deficiencies but turn my face toward and honor my gifts (even my deficiencies) as your good will for me. I do not expect to be completed, ever. Give us the courage and strength to become the people you are creating. Amen.

Catherine Malotky serves in communications at the ELCA Board of Pensions.

READER CALL TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Mail or email to *LWT* Editorial Office

November 2002

Have you ever had to "take it on faith"? Tell us about it in a few paragraphs.

Due July 10, 2002

December 2002

In efforts to be all-embracing, have you celebrated other traditions (perhaps Kwanzaa, a Seder, etc.)? Briefly tell us of your experience.

Due August 10, 2002

January/February 2003

In a few words, share your hopes for the new year.

Due September 10, 2002

IDEANET TOPICS AND DEADLINES

Use the enclosed card or email IdeaNet@elca.org

November 2002

How does your Women of the ELCA group or congregation work to increase fellowship and participation among new members?

Due July 10, 2002

December 2002

How is your group involved with service projects or organizing volunteering opportunities to celebrate the spirit of the Christmas season?

Due August 10, 2002

January/February 2003

Prayer partners: How can you start such a program in your congregations? Share what has worked for you.

Due September 10, 2002

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"For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up
what is planted; ...
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ...
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, 4, 7-8

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